



**For Immediate Release**

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**Eating Peanuts and Nuts  
May Reduce Risk of Sudden Cardiac Death**

*Arlington, VA, June 28, 2002* -- New research shows people eating peanuts and nuts two or more times per week had a 47 percent reduced risk of sudden cardiac death and a 30 percent reduced risk of coronary heart disease death, compared to those who rarely or never ate them. This new research comes from the US Physicians' Health Study and is published in this week's *Archives of Internal Medicine*.

This large prospective cohort study includes over 21,000 male doctors who were followed for an average of 17 years. Researchers controlled for known cardiac risk factors, such as age and aspirin intake, and dietary habits, such as supplement usage and fish consumption. Data from the study suggests that increasing nut consumption among men is associated with a significantly reduced risk of sudden cardiac death and fatal coronary heart disease. Interestingly, in this study the relationship between peanut and nut consumption and sudden cardiac death is linear--higher consumption provided a greater protective effect. This is consistent with previous epidemiological data that shows the greatest benefit from consuming five or more servings (one ounce or a small handful) per week.

Large population studies, such as the Adventists Health Study, the Iowa Women's Health Study and the Harvard Nurses' Health Study, all show cardioprotective benefits from peanut and nut consumption. These studies examined the eating patterns of both men and women and found that small, frequent servings of peanuts, nuts, and peanut butter can reduce the risk of heart disease by 25-50 percent. A growing database of clinical studies indicates that part of the beneficial effect may be due to the fatty acid composition of peanuts and nuts, particularly when they replace food sources of saturated fatty acids, as well as carbohydrates, in the diet.

Researchers at Penn State University (*American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, 1999) tested diets that included 2-3 servings daily of peanuts or peanut butter, rich in monounsaturated fats (MUFA), and found that total and low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol was lowered by 11 and 14 percent, respectively. The higher MUFA diets had the added benefit of maintaining good high-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol levels and lowering triglycerides, both important risk factors for heart disease. Overall, the peanut-rich diets reduced the risk of cardiovascular disease by 21 percent compared to the average American diet, whereas a low-fat diet reduced the risk by only 12 percent.

Although they are actually legumes, peanuts are categorized with other nuts when it comes to nutrition research and consumption patterns. According to the USDA Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion, 68 percent of the "nuts" eaten in the United States are peanuts and peanut butter.

Peanuts are eaten like nuts as snacks and are found in the US Food Guide Pyramid in the protein group, along with other nuts.

In addition to containing over 75 percent of the good unsaturated fat, peanuts provide plant protein and fiber, as well as vitamin E, folate, potassium, magnesium, and zinc, all which are thought to be important to health. Peanuts also contain bioactive components such as phytosterols, flavonoids, and antioxidants, the benefits of which nutrition scientists are only beginning to discover.

When it comes to health, small changes can offer big rewards. Melt peanut butter on your whole-grain toast or bagel instead of butter or full-fat cream cheese, snack on peanuts at your desk instead of chips, or replace the meat in your stir-fry with nuts and peanuts.

The Peanut Institute is a non-profit organization that supports nutrition research and develops educational programs to encourage healthful lifestyles. Learn more about peanuts and health at <http://www.peanut-institute.org>

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